

## THE COURT ASSISTANCE OFFICE – An Idaho Supreme Court Project

### OPENING

The Court Assistance Office (CAO) is a one-stop clearinghouse to access legal services and other resources for those involved in family law cases and other civil (non-criminal) court matters. There are currently court assistance offices in twenty-six courthouses around Idaho. Some of the court assistance office resources, such as an attorney roster, court forms and instructions, can be accessed directly from this site. For other services and materials you may need to call or visit the Court Assistance Office nearest you. The links below will tell you where to find and how to contact the nearest court assistance office, what services and materials are available there, and how to view or download the roster of attorneys or the court forms and instructions.

### OVERVIEW

The Idaho Supreme Court's Committee to Increase Access to the Court began planning the Court Assistance Office Project ("CAOP") in 1998. The Committee had become concerned about the increasing numbers of pro se litigants involved in civil matters, a trend which was especially pronounced in family law cases. All counties in Idaho have been experiencing a uniformly high rate of self representation in these types of cases in recent years, some reporting as many as 80-90% of the litigants being pro se. This phenomenon has slowed the judicial process, and led to growing dissatisfaction with the court system on the part of the litigants, and mounting frustration on the part of all parties involved, litigants and court personnel alike.

The Access Committee commissioned a survey of Idaho self-represented litigants, which found that a majority felt the court system should provide instruction to self-represented litigants, either at the courthouse or at the public library. The Committee conceived of the CAO as a clearinghouse for an array of consumer information and referral for legal assistance for those seeking access to the courts, particularly in domestic relations cases. It patterned the offices on the recommendations made in the American Judicature Society's "Meeting the Challenges of Pro Se Litigants: A Report and Guidebook for Judges and Court Managers" (1998).

The Access Committee obtained funding from the State Justice Institute to conduct a six-month pilot project to establish court assistance offices in three pilot counties. The pilot project was to run from July through December 1999. The purpose of the pilot was to test a variety of staffing models, and to develop the array of services necessary to provide effective assistance to self-represented litigants. Law professor and former magistrate judge Pat Costello was hired to direct the CAOP. Requests for proposals to establish Court Assistance Offices were sent to all 44 counties in the state of Idaho in January 1999. The Access Committee reviewed the proposals and chose Bannock, Latah and Valley counties as the sites for the first pilot offices. Outside funding was obtained to add two additional offices, one in Gooding County, and a regional office that would serve six counties in the Seventh Judicial District. Thus, service was begun in ten counties on July 1, 1999.

The offices are all located in the county courthouses in their respective county seats. Attorneys, court clerks, an interpreter, and a paralegal were hired to operate the offices. A **"Training Curriculum and Reference Guidebook on Public Service for Court Assistance Officers"** was developed, which contained office specifications, materials inventory, pamphlet index, intake forms, a "Guide to Providing Service to the Public", eligibility criteria for various legal services programs, internet links, instructions for court forms, and other information. An informational pamphlet describing the services offered at the Court Assistance Offices was prepared and several thousand were disseminated.

The first priority of the CAOP is to connect pro se litigants with attorneys where possible, and to provide informational resources to assist them in representing themselves where attorney representation is unavailable or not desired. In order to supply the services for which the offices were established, an attorney survey was mailed to all licensed attorneys in or near the counties in which the offices are located. The survey requested a wide range of information designed to assist litigants in acquiring representation. Based on the results of this survey, attorney rosters were prepared and made available to visitors to the offices. A [Directory of Idaho Legal Services](#) was also compiled, which provides a comprehensive guide to legal and related services available in Idaho. The full array of services provided at the CAOs is set out in the following list:

**SERVICES PROVIDED AT THE COURT ASSISTANCE OFFICES:**

\* Information on the risks of self-representation \* Information on attorneys and types of services they can provide (i.e., pro bono and reduced rate representation, unbundled services) \* Referral to mediators \* Application for direct legal services for low-income individuals (i.e., Idaho Legal Aid Services, Idaho Volunteer Lawyers Program) \* Toll-free Legal Resource Line for brief legal consultations (operated by the Idaho Law Foundation), domestic violence hotline (through Idaho Legal Aid Services) and legal research line (from the Idaho State Law Library) \* Information on services provided by government and private agencies \* Court forms and instructions for some types of civil cases, with an emphasis on family law \* Review of completed court forms \* Written instructions on how to proceed with some types of civil cases, including which forms to use and how to fill them out \* Use of computers to prepare court documents, and research and access other Internet resources \* Informational brochures and pamphlets on a variety of legal topics, organizations and agencies\* Information on pro se litigation workshops sponsored by Idaho Legal Aid Services and Idaho Volunteer Lawyers Program \* Information and referral to resources to protect children in high-conflict cases (e.g. visitation supervisors) \* Instructional videos, with accompanying brochures on topics including an introduction to the court system, family law, and domestic violence \* Workshops on obtaining a divorce, and on modifying and enforcing divorce or custody decrees\* **CAO Website to access and download court forms, instructions, and other CAO resources** ([www.courtselfhelp.idaho.gov](http://www.courtselfhelp.idaho.gov)).

Many materials are available in both English and Spanish, and a certified Court interpreter is available by telephone through the CAOs.

The Justice Management Institute of Denver, Colorado evaluated the CAOP, in January 2000, following the end of the pilot project period. The final evaluation report, "**Helping Self-Represented Litigants in Idaho: An Evaluation Report on the Idaho Court Assistance Office Project**" was published in July, 2000. The results of this evaluation indicate that the CAOP has been very successful in delivering the services for which it was designed. In their first six months of operation, the offices serviced 664 first-time and repeat visitors. In a follow-up customer satisfaction survey sent by JMI to many of the office users, 98% reported that they found the service to be helpful and that they would use the CAOP again. 93% of the users reported that their use of the service increased their satisfaction with the court process.

The CAOP was selected by the American Judicature Society as one of the projects to be showcased at the National Conference on Pro Se Litigation, held in Scottsdale, Arizona in November, 1999. The National Association of IOLTA (Interest on Lawyer's Trust Accounts) Programs selected the CAOP as one of six innovative pilot projects to be featured in its report, "Replication and Innovation in Legal Services", published in July, 2000.

The Access Committee concluded that court assistance offices were an effective and efficient way to provide assistance to self-represented litigants. It further concluded that a regional approach with at least one court assistance officer in each judicial district was optimum for Idaho's diverse geography and dispersed population. Operation of the existing offices has been continued and the host counties have begun to participate in their funding. Two more offices were opened on July 1, 2000, in Canyon and Twin Falls counties. Additional offices will open in Ada County, Nez Perce County, and the First Judicial District later this year. As a result, every judicial district in the state will have one or two Court Assistance Offices. Over time, the Committee expects the court assistance officers in each district to extend services into all of the outlying counties of the state.

The 2001 Idaho Legislature enacted [Section 32-1402\(5\), I.C.](#) which established court assistance officers by law as part of a system of coordinated family services in Idaho courts. The legislature also appropriated funds to support the court assistance offices in each of the seven judicial districts.

#### **FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

- Benewah County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Michelle Reynolds  
701 College Ave  
St Maries, ID 83861  
(208) 245-3241  
Email: [mreynolds@benewahcounty.org](mailto:mreynolds@benewahcounty.org)
- Bonner County  
**Court Assistance Office, hours MW 9-12:30 and 1:30-4**  
Janet Meserve  
Bonner County Courthouse  
215 S. 1st Avenue  
Sandpoint, ID 83864  
(208) 265-1449  
Fax: (208) 265-4256  
Email: [cao@co.bonner.id.us](mailto:cao@co.bonner.id.us)
- Kootenai County  
**Court Assistance Office, hours T TH 10-4**  
Janet Meserve  
Kootenai County Courthouse  
324 W. Garden Ave.  
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83816

(208) 446-1186  
Fax: (208) 446-1187  
Email: [jmeserve@co.kootenai.id.us](mailto:jmeserve@co.kootenai.id.us)

- Shoshone County  
No CAO; inquiries referred to Janet Meserve  
Shoshone County Courthouse  
700 Bank Street  
Wallace, ID 83873  
(208) 752-1266  
Email: [jmeserve@co.kootenai.id.us](mailto:jmeserve@co.kootenai.id.us)

## **SECOND JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

- 1.Court Assistance Offices Lead CAO  
Frances H. Thompson  
PO Box 9071  
Moscow, ID 83843-9071  
(208) 883-2240  
Fax: (208) 883-2259  
Email: [courtassistance@latah.id.us](mailto:courtassistance@latah.id.us)
- Clearwater County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Renee Robins  
Clearwater County District Court  
PO Box 586  
Orofino, ID 83544  
(208) 476-5596  
Fax: (208) 476-5159  
Email: [robins@clearwatercounty.org](mailto:robins@clearwatercounty.org)
- Latah County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
**hours MWF 9-1:30, MW 1:30-3:00, T TH 11:30-2:00**  
Frances H. Thompson  
P.O. Box 8068  
6th & Van Buren St  
Moscow, ID 83843-0568  
(208) 882-8580 X 3500  
Fax: (208) 883-2259  
Email: [courtassistance@latah.id.us](mailto:courtassistance@latah.id.us)
- Nez Perce County  
**Court Assistance Office, hours M 9:00-5:00 W 8:00-3:00 F 9:00-5:00**  
Becka Maxwell  
Nez Perce County Courthouse  
1230 Main Street 2nd Flr  
P.O. Box 896  
Lewiston, ID 83501  
(208) 799-3191  
Fax: (208) 799-3058  
Email: [courtassistance@co.nezperce.id.us](mailto:courtassistance@co.nezperce.id.us)

## **THIRD JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

- Canyon County  
**Court Assistance Office, hours M-TH 9-4**  
Tony Salazar  
1115 Albany St.  
Room 315  
Caldwell, ID 83605  
(208) 454-7455  
Fax: (208) 454-7442 or (208) 454-6626  
Email: [cao@canyoncounty.org](mailto:cao@canyoncounty.org)
- Gem County  
Esma Oribio  
Pam VanHooser  
Gem County District Court

415 E Main Street Room 300  
Emmett, ID 83617  
(208) 365-4221  
Fax: (208) 365-6172  
Email: [cao@co.gem.id.us](mailto:cao@co.gem.id.us)

- Owyhee County  
Dorla Stoneman  
Lena Johnson  
Owyhee County District Court  
PO Box 128  
Murphy, ID 83650  
(208) 495-2806  
Fax: (208) 495-1226  
Email: [dkstoneman@co.owyhee.id.us](mailto:dkstoneman@co.owyhee.id.us)  
Email: [lmjohnson@co.owyhee.id.us](mailto:lmjohnson@co.owyhee.id.us)
- Payette County  
Mirna Martin  
Payette County Court Assistance Officer  
1130 3rd Ave N Rm 104  
Payette, ID 83661  
(208) 642-6000  
Fax: (208) 624-6011  
Email: [mmartin@payettecounty.org](mailto:mmartin@payettecounty.org)

#### **FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

- Ada County  
**Court Assistance Office, hours M-F 8-5**  
Jane Newby  
Patti Duvall  
200 W. Front St.  
Boise, ID 83702-7300  
(208) 287-6963 (CAO)  
OR (208) 287-6944  
Fax: (208) 287-6919  
Email: [dcnewbym@adaweb.net](mailto:dcnewbym@adaweb.net)  
Email: [pduvall@adaweb.net](mailto:pduvall@adaweb.net)
- Boise County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Lisa Tain  
Jane Newby see: Ada County  
Trina Green see: Ada County  
420 Main St  
Idaho City, ID 83631  
(208) 392-4452 X 139  
Email: [ltain@co.boise.id.us](mailto:ltain@co.boise.id.us)
- Elmore County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Kris Gatlin  
Sandy Mealer  
Elmore County Courthouse  
150 S 4 E Ste 5  
Mountain Home, ID 83647  
(208) 587-2133 X 218  
Email: [mhiler@elmorecounty.org](mailto:mhiler@elmorecounty.org)
- Valley County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Debra Gaither  
219 Main St.  
PO Box 1350  
PO Box 1350  
Cascade, ID 83611  
(208) 382-7177 OR 382-7178  
Fax: (208) 382-7184  
Email: [dgaither@co.valley.id.us](mailto:dgaither@co.valley.id.us)

#### **FIFTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

- Blaine County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Andrea Logan  
201 2nd Ave S  
Hailey, ID 83333  
(208) 788-5521  
Fax: (208) 785-5527  
Email: [alogan@co.blaine.id.us](mailto:alogan@co.blaine.id.us)
- Cassia County  
**Court Assistance Office, hours MW 12-5**  
JoAnn Smith  
Tara Gunderson  
1459 Overland Ave  
Burley, ID 83348  
(208) 878-4461 X 298  
Fax: (208) 878-9109  
Email: [shigley@cassiacyounty.org](mailto:shigley@cassiacyounty.org)  
Email: [jsmith@cassiacyounty.org](mailto:jsmith@cassiacyounty.org)
- Gooding County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Leslie Renner  
Becky Tanner  
624 Main Street  
PO Box 477  
Gooding, ID 83330  
(208) 934-5932 (CAO)  
(208) 934-4261  
Fax: (208) 934-4408  
Email: [lrenner@co.gooding.id.us](mailto:lrenner@co.gooding.id.us)  
Email: [btanner@co.gooding.id.us](mailto:btanner@co.gooding.id.us)
- Jerome County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Robin Oliveira  
300 N Lincoln Rm 310  
Jerome, ID 83338  
(208) 324-8811
- Twin Falls County  
**Court Assistance Office, hours M-TH 1-4**  
Jerry Woolley  
Jury Commissioner  
PO Box 126  
Twin Falls, ID 83303-0126  
(208) 736-4137  
Fax: (208) 736-4002  
Email: [jwoolley@co.twin-falls.id.us](mailto:jwoolley@co.twin-falls.id.us)

#### **SIXTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

- Bannock County  
**Court Assistance Office, hours M\_F 9-10 and 2-3 or by appt.**  
Darcy Taylor  
Bannock County  
624 E. Center  
Room 220  
Pocatello, ID 83201  
(208) 236-7067  
Fax: (208) 236-7012  
Email: [darcy@co.bannock.id.us](mailto:darcy@co.bannock.id.us)
- Bear Lake County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Kerry Hong

Deputy Clerk  
PO Box 190  
Paris, ID 83261  
(208) 945-2208  
(208) 236-7377  
Fax: (208) 945-2780  
Email: [kerryh@co.bannock.id.us](mailto:kerryh@co.bannock.id.us)

- Caribou County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Stacie Jorgensen  
Deputy Clerk  
PO Box 775  
Soda Springs, ID 83276  
(208) 547-2146  
Fax: (208) 547-4759  
Email: [staciejorgensen@hotmail.com](mailto:staciejorgensen@hotmail.com)
- Franklin County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Linda Hampton  
Deputy Clerk  
39 W. Oneida  
Preston, ID 83263  
(208) 852-0877  
Fax: (208) 852-2926  
Email: [hampton@plmw.com](mailto:hampton@plmw.com)
- Oneida County  
**Court Assistance Office**  
Karen Wharton  
Chief Deputy Clerk  
10 Court Street  
Malad, ID 83252  
(208) 766-4285 X 114  
(208) 766-4116  
Fax: (208) 766-2990  
Email: [kwharton@co.oneida.id.us](mailto:kwharton@co.oneida.id.us)
- Power County  
**Court Assistance Office, hours TH and F by appt.**  
Sharee Sprague  
Deputy Clerk  
543 Bannock  
American Falls, ID 83211  
(208) 226-7618  
Fax: (208) 226-7612  
Email: [ssprague@co.power.id.us](mailto:ssprague@co.power.id.us)

#### **SEVENTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

- 7th Judicial District Court Assistance Office:  
  
Cindy L. Campbell  
District Wide CAO  
PO Box 853  
Blackfoot, ID 83221  
(208) 785-5057  
Fax: (208) 785-5165  
Email: [cclcid@cableone.net](mailto:cclcid@cableone.net)

For information on the Court Assistance Office Project, please contact:

Judge Michael Dennard  
Director, Court Assistance Office Project  
Ada County Courthouse  
200 W Front St  
Boise ID 83702-7300